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Afghanistan Situation Report

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2 April 1985

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AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT

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This document is prepared weekly by the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis and the Office of Soviet Analysis. Questions or comments on the issues raised in the publication should be []

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RESUPPLYING THE INSURGENTS

Burhanuddin Rabbani, the Peshawar-based leader of the Jamiat-i-Islami insurgent organization, claimed in early March that his supplies of military and support equipment--including boots and clothing--have recently increased. He claims that the aid is provided by "Arabs" and distributed by the Pakistani Government.

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Comment:

Improvement in the insurgents' military supplies and training probably will enable the guerrillas to intensify attacks against Soviet and regime targets this spring. Direct supply of selected insurgent groups by the Pakistani Government will assuage the feelings of some resistance commanders who have become irritated with delays experienced in dealing through Peshawar resistance organizations. The insurgents, however, probably will find resupplying their forces in Afghanistan more difficult this spring as the Soviets increase their efforts to stop insurgent infiltration.

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NARCOTICS ACTIVITY IN AFGHANISTAN

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Afghan and Soviet officials continue to make little effort to halt the opium trade and may even be promoting drug production, trafficking, and use, despite Moscow's expressed concern over drug use and trafficking by Soviet conscripts. Although there have been sporadic Afghan regime attempts to organize enforcement efforts--a year ago rumors circulated in Kabul that the Government was offering opium growers 10 percent more than the market price

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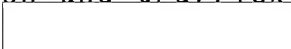
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Comment: Given the regime's lack of control in the countryside and preoccupation with fighting the mujahedin, Afghan and Soviet officials are unlikely to move against opium cultivation and trafficking in a serious way any time soon. 

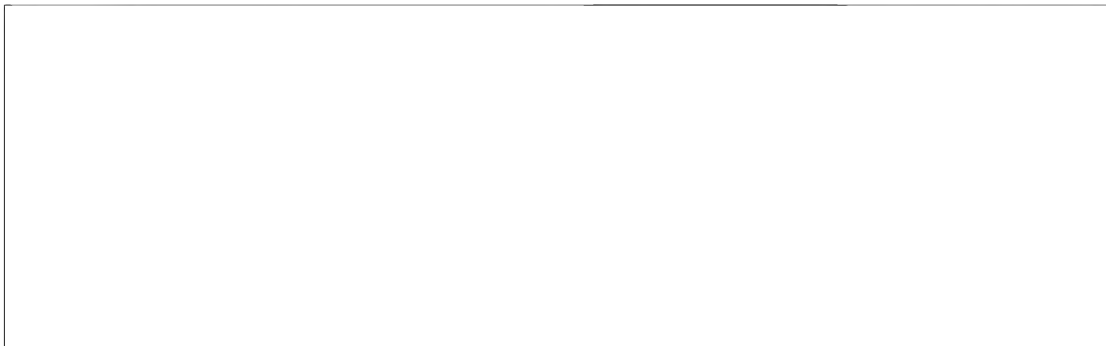
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IN BRIEF

-- Kabul radio announced on 31 March that insurgents had killed former Andarab Valley guerrilla commander Juma Khan. A one-time member of Hizbi Islami--Gulbuddin faction, Juma Khan defected with his band to the government in fall 1984 and was instrumental in blocking Panjsher Valley insurgents' supply lines and access to their rear base at Khost-e Fereng. 

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PERSPECTIVE**THE IRANIAN-AFGHAN BORDER: A HISTORY OF DISPUTES**

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The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution during 1979 added a new dimension to the problems in the historically troublesome Iranian-Afghan border area. More than 300,000 Afghan refugees, many of them ethnically similar to peoples living in the Iranian border area, probably have fled to Iran. Some reportedly return to Afghanistan periodically to fight--or farm. Afghan resistance groups are active in western Afghanistan, with some using Iran as a sanctuary, and some maintaining offices in Iran. Supply routes for groups fighting in western Afghanistan traverse Iran. Insurgent caravans most frequently cross the border in the south in the Sistan Basin area or in the north, to the west of Herat City.

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Border Basics

The 900-kilometer-long Iranian-Afghan border, extending roughly along a north-south axis between the Soviet Union and Pakistan, is easily crossed. Border terrain varies from relatively low hills and mountains to huge salt flats, brackish lakes and marshes, and sandy or rocky plains. No dominant physical feature marks the border area; the boundary is defined by small streams, minor water divides, and ridges interspersed with straight-line segments. Access to water, the primary cause of past disputes, was a key factor used to determine the boundary alignment. The border area is sparsely populated by Persians, Pushtuns, Tajiks, Baluchis, and smaller ethnic groups.

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Establishing the Border

The Iranian-Afghan border was the subject of deliberations by four arbitration commissions between 1872 and 1935, with the southern section of the boundary the first to be addressed. Both Persian and Afghan groups pressed claims for use of the Helmand River waters that empty into a large basin of semi-permanent lakes and marshes. Disputes over the

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[REDACTED]

territory served by the waters where grazing and agriculture flourished eventually led to a request for arbitration. In 1872, British Major General Goldsmid headed a commission that divided the basin, known in Iran as the Sistan. The commission award allocated access to irrigation points and canals and included a key provision that neither side should construct "works" to interfere with the other's water supplies. The commission, however, did not survey and neither delimited nor demarcated the border between the countries. Both sides were displeased with the award, but the British forced them to accept it. [REDACTED]

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A short stretch of the northern section of the boundary was settled by terms of an award in 1890 drawn by another British officer, Major General MacLean. Both Iran and Afghanistan claimed a small basin that had once been cultivated but had been abandoned. A compromise solution was accepted by both sides and a detailed description of the placement of 39 boundary markers was made. The remainder of the northern section of the boundary follows the Hari Rud, a major Afghan river that flows north into the Soviet Union. [REDACTED]

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The dispute over water use in the southern section of the boundary arose again in the early 1900s because of a change in a channel of the Helmand River's delta and a severe drought. The British responded to a call for arbitration in 1902 by sending a large commission headed by Colonel McMahon. The commission was instructed to follow the earlier rulings of the Goldsmid commission with McMahon to interpret the language of the agreement compared to more recent, detailed topographic maps of the area. Boundary markers were then described in text and placed in the ground. The award also clarified and refined language used to define the amount of water to be made legally available to Iran. [REDACTED]

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The central section of the boundary was defined in 1935 after a minor dispute had arisen over an area adjoining a section of boundary demarcated earlier. A commission headed by a Turkish officer, General Altai, produced a compromise calling for some 38 pillars to be erected to demarcate the remaining 400 km of the border. [REDACTED]

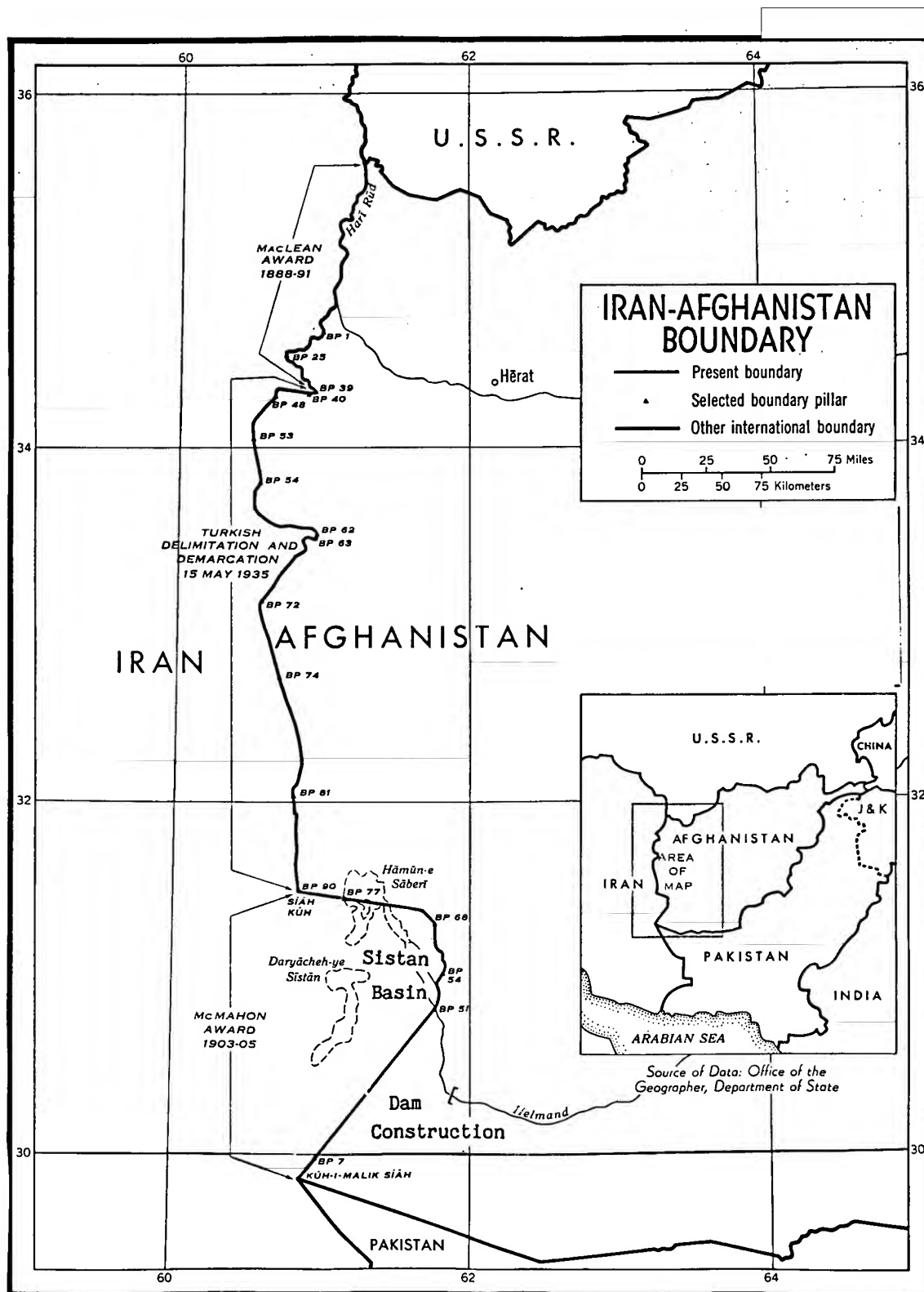
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Recent Water Concerns

A bilateral water-sharing treaty, signed in 1973 and ratified in 1977, was intended to end decades of bickering. But in 1979 when the Afghans announced development plans calling for a new dam 70 km upstream from the border, the Iranians objected. Preliminary work was halted in 1980 shortly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

A resumption of construction would likely again cause political reverberations in Iran because a completed dam would significantly disrupt downstream hydrology. Though water supplies guaranteed by the treaty signed in 1977 would not be affected, the possibility of Iran gaining additional water supplies would be foreclosed.

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